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‘Popular fiction after Richardson’

by Bonnie Latimer

The influence upon the later novel of *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-4) is not universally acknowledged—but, this essay will suggest, it ought to be. Famously, it was a favourite of Austen’s, who adapted it as a play, and George Eliot prized it above *Clarissa*.¹ Closer to its own time, popular fiction reprises it: in 1771, Elizabeth Griffith’s *Lady Barton* imagines herself as Harriet Byron, whilst the anonymous *History of Mr Byron and Miss Greville* and *The Adopted Daughter* (both 1767) recycle names and scenes familiar from *Grandison*.² Sophia Briscoe’s *The History of Miss Melmoth* (1772) appears to reproduce a number of its tableaux.³ For readers afraid of its bulk, a kind abridger produced a redacted *Grandison*.⁴ Some authors, apprised of the novel’s imminent appearance, did not wait for Richardson to publish before responding: *The Memoirs of Sir Charles Goodville*, advertised over the winter of 1753, pipped Richardson to the post by almost a year.⁵ The ‘Lover of Virtue’ unflatteringly noted *Grandison*’s effect upon novels of its generation: ‘Your success has farther corrupted our taste, by giving birth to an infinite series of other compositions all of the same kind’.⁶

This article examines *Grandison*’s immediate legacy following its publication in late 1753 and early 1754, and how it helped to shape the popular novels of the mid-1750s, 60s, and early 70s. I suggest that *Grandison* offers a grand ideological vision of personal virtue which functions as a greater, organising social principle. Its ultimate expression is the stable community, bonded together through personal example and superintendence, and through the

¹ Jane Austen, *Sir Charles Grandison: Or, the Happy Man*, ed. Brian Southam (Oxford, 1981); Gillian Beer, *George Eliot* (Brighton, 1986), 84.

² *The History of Mr Byron and Miss Greville*, 2 vols (London, 1767). The novel recycles the names Byron and Greville, but also various situations. See also *The Adopted Daughter; Or the History of Miss Clarissa B*, 2 vols (London, 1767).

³ [Sophia Briscoe], *The History of Miss Melmoth*, 2 vols (Dublin, 1772).

⁴ *The History of Sir Charles Grandison, Abridged from the Works of Samuel Richardson* (London, [1769?]).

⁵ *The Memoirs of Sir Charles Goodville and His Family*, 2 vols (London, 1753).

⁶ ‘Lover of Virtue’, *Critical Remarks upon Sir Charles Grandison...* (London, 1754), 4.

public encouragement of marriage. Richardson's Sir Charles embodies the magnetically virtuous individual whose duty and pleasure it is to draw together the community—and perhaps even the nation. This paradigm of virtue provides a key reference-point for popular fiction after Richardson, whether it is imitated, repurposed, or mocked.

This article reads a range of later novelists as respondents to Richardson, from light sentimental novels forgotten by criticism, to more celebrated sentimental utopian fictions—from texts which evidently reflect his influence, such as Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762), Anna Meades's *William Harrington* (1771), and Mary Walker Hamilton's *Munster Village* (1778), to narratives with very different politics, such as John Kidgell's *The Card* (1755) and John Shebbeare's Fielding-esque romp *The Marriage Act* (1754). For all their variety of outlook and quality, I suggest that these novels can be productively read as reproducing a Grandisonian ideal virtue and utopian country estate. If *Grandison*'s vision of the ideal society is neither ideologically innovative nor philosophically sophisticated, it does crystallise within novelistic fiction an image of the good life and the benevolent community leader which proves intensely and enduringly popular in the years following its publication. Before embarking on this argument, however, it is necessary to consider what it means to say that *Grandison* is an 'influential' novel.

Reproducing Grandison

Questions of literary influence are notoriously hard to resolve. In the eighteenth century, authors often conflated any clear lines between influence, adaptation, translation, and rewriting, by framing their works as 'alter'd' versions of another text, by writing 'in imitation of' someone else, or by presenting as 'translations' texts which differed substantially from their originals. Appropriation, of one kind or another, was a means by which Richardson's contemporaries repeatedly engaged with his writing, from the *Pamela* controversy, to Lady Echlin's alternative ending to *Clarissa*, to *The Paths of Virtue*, which adapted Richardson's novels for children.⁷ There is a strong tradition of scholarship on rewritings and extensions of

⁷ See Thomas Keymer and Peter Sabor (eds), *The Pamela Controversy: Criticisms and Adaptations of Samuel Richardson's Pamela, 1740-1750*, 6 vols (London, 2001); Elizabeth Echlin, *An Alternative Ending to Richardson's Clarissa*, ed. Dimitar Daphinoff (Bern, 1982); 'Samuel Richardson', *The Paths of Virtue Delineated* (London, 1768); Leah Price, 'Reading (and not reading) Richardson, 1756-1868', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 29 (2000), 87-103.

Richardson's fictions, understandably focused on his first novel.⁸ Within such comment, *Grandison* remains comparatively neglected.⁹

A major contention of this essay is that *Grandison* deserves more recognition as an 'influential' novel—although a piece of this length can only begin to make this argument. Contemporaries such as the 'Lover of Virtue', cited above, certainly saw it that way. Catherine Morland and Isabella Thorpe's discussion in *Northanger Abbey* (1818) of Radcliffean gothic implicitly understands *Grandison*, that 'amazing horrid book', as paradigmatic of the sentimental-realist novel, an antitype to Isabella's favourite tales.¹⁰ Austen's use of *Grandison* as shorthand for the mid-century sentimental novel is less surprising if we recall Alan Dugald McKillop's insight that Richardson's last published fiction 'set the tone' of novels for the second half of the century.¹¹ Following McKillop, Gerard Barker sees *Grandison*'s effect on later-century novels as 'profound and pervasive', although he notes that 'the nature of its influence has never been thoroughly examined'—a challenge which subsequent critics have not notably met. Barker identifies as key to *Grandison*'s importance both the exemplary character of Sir Charles and Harriet's narrative role, the latter point explored by Joe Bray, who claims *Grandison* as an anticipator of free indirect discourse.¹² Looking closely, one can see *Grandison* cropping up repeatedly in the decades following its publication: it is alluded to in multiple forgotten texts, but also by Griffiths, Austen, and Edgeworth, as well as being adapted (*The Paths of Virtue*, the abridged *Grandison*), and extended in the form of Mary Wollstonecraft's free translation *Young Grandison* (1790).¹³ Indeed, in certain areas of eighteenth-century novel scholarship *Grandison*'s influence is routinely noted, such as work on Sarah Scott.¹⁴

⁸ As well as Keymer and Sabor, see William Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750* (San Bernadino, CA, 1998); David Brewer, *The Afterlife of Character, 1726-1825* (Philadelphia, 2005).

⁹ The major exception is Gerard Barker's *Grandison's Heirs: The Paragon's Progress in the Late Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Newark, 1985). See also, *inter alia*, Edward Copeland, 'The burden of *Grandison*: Jane Austen and her contemporaries', *Women and Literature* 3 (1983), 98-106.

¹⁰ Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (1818), ed. James Kinsley and John Davie (Oxford, 2003), 26.

¹¹ Alan Dugald McKillop, *Samuel Richardson: Printer and Novelist* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1936), 213.

¹² Barker, *Grandison's Heirs*, 13, 9, 36, 44; Joe Bray, 'The source of "dramatized consciousness": Richardson, Austen, and stylistic influence', *Style* 35: 1 (2001), 18-33.

¹³ Cf Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), ed. Kathryn Kirkpatrick (Oxford, 1994), 477.

¹⁴ For example, Vincent Carretta, 'Utopia Limited: Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* and *The History of Sir George Ellison*', *Age of Johnson* 5 (1992): 303-25; Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender, and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge, 1996), 87; Alfred Lutz, 'Commercial Capitalism, Classical Republicanism, and the Man of Sensibility in *The History of Sir George Ellison*', *SEL* 39 [1999]: 557-74; Bonnie Latimer, 'Courting Dominion: *Sir Charles Grandison*, *Sir George Ellison*, and the organizing principle of masculinity', *The Eighteenth-Century Novel* 9 (2012), 109-131.

Even whilst acknowledging these relationships, though, one must recognise the dangers in asserting the influence of one text upon another. Firstly, as David Brewer reminds us, investigations of borrowing tend to suffer from ‘a paucity of evidence’.¹⁵ Secondly, even where one can identify authorial knowledge of an earlier work and pinpoint textual parallels, it is well to remember that *post hoc non est propter hoc*. In many cases, it is impossible to prove beyond doubt that a phrase or idea was plucked from one precursor, however significant, rather than simply being ‘in the air’ at a particular moment. Thirdly, attempts to specify influence risk positioning the chronologically prior text as ‘more original’ than the later one, perhaps as pioneering rather than merely containing the features which the second allegedly borrows: when, of course, that first text may be just as enmeshed in networks of influence and imitation as the second. Where does this leave us, however, when faced with a description such as this, of a married couple in Catherine Parry’s *Eden Vale* (1784)?

Mr. and Mrs. Grandison seem literally to have but one soul; they live, they breathe but for each other...The cheerfulness which they are so remarkable for, seems encreased by each other’s presence, and you see an involuntary joy light up their countenances when they meet, even after the shortest absence.¹⁶

The picture echoes Sir Charles and Harriet, who have ‘hearts, so united, so formed, for one another’, and whose expressions reveal ‘a joy that lighted up a more charming flush than usual’.¹⁷ It is hardly possible to prove that Parry wrote with a copy of *Grandison* to hand, or even that she had read it—but to regard the re-use of the name and the verbal similarities as coincidental is also unpersuasive. Reading such a novel, one can, without presuming to recover authorial intentionality, see it as engaging with *Grandison*.

In addressing *Grandison*’s influence, I draw on the thought of several scholars. Foremost amongst these is David Brewer, whose term ‘imaginative expansionism’ captures a host of recreative practices through which readers extend fictions, treating characters in ‘broadly successful texts...as if they were both fundamentally incomplete and the common property of all...merely a starting point’ for another text.¹⁸ Although Brewer’s consideration of novelistic ‘afterlives’ is foundational to this argument, I extend his focus on character to consider tropes such as the country estate and publicly sanctioned marriage. Another suggestive model is Catherine Kodat’s theory of the ‘eidetic image’. Kodat understands

¹⁵ Brewer, *The Afterlife of Character*, 7.

¹⁶ [Catherine Parry], *Eden Vale*, 2 vols (London, 1784), 1: 12-13.

¹⁷ Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-4), 7 vols, ed. Jocelyn Harris (Oxford, 1972), 7: 438-8, 6: 226. Hereafter cited in-text as ‘Gr.’.

¹⁸ Brewer, *Afterlife of Character*, 2.

‘adaptation’ as an ‘after-image that is a kind of mental reviewing of an image that has passed’, representing ‘a complementary “negative” of the original image, in that there are common properties shared by both...(usually shape), but also clear differences (usually color).’¹⁹ Such a metaphor may be useful for thinking about later incarnations of Grandison-hall such as Austen’s *Pemberley*, recognisable as having a similar ‘shape’ but ‘coloured’ by different preoccupations. Most useful, though, is Rhoda Trooboff’s softer-focus idea of influence, which represents ‘an organic, familial, quasi-Darwinian model, which I call *reproduction*’ and which disclaims the ‘quasi-legal and quasi-economic models...embodied in “plagiarism” and “appropriation”’.²⁰ Trooboff’s conceptualisation is particularly eligible for this argument because it does not assign intentionality or suggest that a precursor-text is the *only* or even principal source of a later one: instead, she reads the reappearance of tropes between texts as a significant *reproduction* which indicates influence but which does not preclude either text’s participation in wider conversations. In this essay, I try to position *Grandison* not as wholly innovating the features which I suggest later writers drew from it, but as realising them in a way which proved compelling for contemporaries, and which invited rewriting.

Richardson’s fictions courted reproduction: as Brewer notes, Richardson ‘built opportunities for imaginative expansion...directly into [his] work’, for instance by invoking an extratextual ‘fictional archive’ through which the reader could project Pamela’s ‘off-page’ life.²¹ I suggest that a similar effect is achieved through the accounts of Grandison-hall, which abound with detail, but also indicate their own insufficiency, and the consequent need to imagine more. Harriet’s letters through volume 7 outline life at the hall, but teasingly leave gaps. She praises Sir Charles’s feasting of his tenants, but announces that she ‘will not trouble you...with an account’ of it. She alludes to the ‘charm[ing] contriv[ance]’ and ‘minut[e]’ detail with which Sir Charles organises the servants, but this is only to whet the appetite: when her sketch ends, Harriet begs Dr Bartlett to expatiate upon ‘the charming subject’ of the estate, and to ‘tell...more of...Sir Charles’s management and intentions’ (*Gr.*, 7: 285-8). Unhappily, they are interrupted and the topic never resumed: but I suggest that here, Richardson encourages the reader to fill in a more detailed account. Also significant is the insistence on reproducing features of Sir Charles’s estate; amongst others, Mrs Selby instantly

¹⁹ Catherine Kodat (2005), cited in Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd edition (London, 2013), 172.

²⁰ Rhoda Trooboff, ‘Reproducing Oroonoko: A case study in plagiarism, textual parallelism, and creative borrowing’, in Susan Iwanisziw, *Troping Oroonoko from Behn to Bandele* (Burlington, VT, 2004), 108-140: 109.

²¹ Brewer, *Afterlife of Character*, 114, 136.

determines to construct a servants' library along the lines of Sir Charles's (*Gr.*, 7: 286). A desire for 'more of' Sir Charles—to borrow Brewer's phrase—is not only experienced by *Grandison*'s characters, but is recommended to the novel's readership, in the concluding 'Editor's Note' and 'Letter to a Lady'. Here, Richardson 'leav[es] decisions' about his characters' futures to the reader, encouraging them to picture new characters, such as Harriet and Sir Charles's 'fine and forward child' (*Gr.*, 7: 468). Given the openness of this invitation, it is surprising that scholarship has not focused more on engagements with *Grandison*. With this in mind, I turn now to a closer examination of *Grandison*'s fantasia of a well-ordered society, which, I suggest, becomes paradigmatic for later novelists.

Crouds and societies: Community romance

Sarah Scott's rakish visitor to Millenium Hall, Lamont, who acts as a devil's advocate throughout that novel, challenges the ladies of the Hall by suggesting that their interest in constructing an ideal society is at odds with that society's isolation from the *beau monde*. Mrs Mancel sets him straight:

Do you then...mistake a croud for society? I know not two things more opposite. How little society is there to be found in what you call the world? It might more properly be compared to that state of war, which Hobbes supposes the first condition of mankind...What I understand by society is a state of mutual confidence, reciprocal services, and correspondent affections...²²

Mrs Mancel's 'society' is sentimental ('correspondent affections') and latitudinarian (reciprocal benefits underpinning mutual affection). But there are two points here: firstly, the remote georgic world of Millenium Hall is not at odds with society in the abstract, but figures it, or even *constitutes* it. Secondly, despite the emphasis on reciprocity, any reader of Scott will know that the Millenium Hall community is deeply hierarchized, depending upon the exemplary ladies who head it.

In this way, Scott's novel bears comparison to the ideal societies of many 'sentimental' novels from the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which purport to be private love stories, but which are also, in some sense, condition-of-England novels, *community romances* whose amorous plots terminate not in narrow prospects of personal bliss, but in

²² Sarah Scott, *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762), ed. Gary Kelly (Ontario, 1995), 111-112. Hereafter cited in-text as 'MH'.

more expansive social or communal visions. The tendency is apparent in Austen's fiction, from the vista presented by *Emma* (1816)—the 'sweet view' of the English landscape dominated by the property whose doyenne Emma will be—to the conclusions of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Mansfield Park* (1814), which end with their heroines not only as brides of the novel's most upright men, but as agents of the moral order of their communities (Marianne's romance makes her a wife, but also the 'patroness of a village').²³ These rural communities surrounding the virtuous genteel protagonists owe much to a classical utopian tradition (as Christine Rees notes, they are indebted to the 'Horatian ideal' of the country estate), but, I suggest, such conclusions can also productively be read as marked by Grandisonian tropes.²⁴ Grandison-hall, where Sir Charles presides, with the 'happiness of hundreds' bound up in his, represents 'paradise'—which, for his dependants, consists of strict 'Laws' and an improving library (*Gr.*, 7: 265, 285). He creates a secure, regulated demesne, and in so doing, as Gerard Barker argues, he symbolically purges the novelistic estate of the Fielding-esque reformed rake and squire, in favour of a new paragon.²⁵ His control over this space is enabled through personal scrutiny and example: he takes 'a personal Survey of his whole estate', making himself 'acquainted with every tenant, and even cottager...enquir[ing] into his circumstances'. The tenants' obedience is ensured through the esteem due to his uniform virtue, with the result that Sir Charles exacts more respect than his social superiors, as those on his estate 'watch his eye in silent reverence'. As Dr Bartlett remarks, Sir Charles is, in this, an example to the 'whole world' and thus a significant political force within the novel's imagination (*Gr.*, 7: 287-9). This self-creation of the virtuous protagonist as organiser of and exemplar to the community represents the coalescing of different mid-century ideas of virtue, realised in a distinctly Grandisonian form and bound together by 'the seemingly universal admiration of Sir Charles'.²⁶

²³ Jane Austen, *Emma* (1816), ed. James Kinsley and intro. Adela Pinch (Oxford, 2003), 283; *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), ed. James Kinsley and intro. Margaret Anne Doody and Claire Lamont (Oxford, 2004), 288.

²⁴ Christine Rees, *Utopian Imagination and Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (London, 1996), 179.

²⁵ Barker, *Grandison's Heirs*, 26.

²⁶ Tita Chico, 'Details and frankness: Affective relations in *Sir Charles Grandison*', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 38 (2009), 45-63: 47. It is beyond this essay's scope to engage in detail with Sir Charles's forebears, but significant contexts include libertine discourse, conduct literature, and latitudinarianism. See Mary Yates, 'The Christian rake in *Sir Charles Grandison*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 24: 3 (1984), 545-61; Sylvia Kasey Marks, *Sir Charles Grandison: The Compleat Conduct Book* (Lewisburg, PA, 1986); John Dussinger, 'Richardson's "Christian vocation"', *Papers on Language and Literature* 3 (1967), 3-19; Elaine McGirr, 'Manly lessons: *Sir Charles Grandison*, the rake, and the man of sentiment', *Studies in the Novel* 39: 3 (2007), 267-83.

Popular post-*Grandison* novelists such as John Shebbeare and Anna Meades conclude with closely comparable utopian visions of the English country estate, which I suggest can be read as engagements with Richardson's novel. Shebbeare's *The Marriage Act*, published months after *Grandison*, positions itself in the tradition of Fielding, 'an Author whom we adore'—and yet distinct parallels exist between his work and Richardson's.²⁷ Shebbeare's hero, Sir William Worthy, landscapes his gardens similarly to Sir Charles,

decorating and adorning the Seat of his Ancestors...The Water was elegantly understood, and designed, winding in noble Meanders, through Plantations of Trees...the Banks smiling with living Turf...all reflected in the translucent Fluid, which fell in natural Cascades. (*MA*, 2: 174-5)

This mirrors *Grandison*-hall, which features 'a winding stream... quickened by a noble cascade' in a 'park...remarkable for its prospects, lawns, and...trees of large growth...the plantations of [Sir Charles's] ancestors' (*Gr.*, 7: 272). Like Sir Charles, however, for Shebbeare's hero the curatorship of his grounds is the backdrop to the real interest:

This was all...executed as much for the sake of giving Bread to the honest and frugal Labourer, as for the Beauty which it afforded...Such was [Sir William's] Reputation in his native Land...that he was beloved by the Hearts of thousands...His Manner of Living was a Pattern to be followed by all human Nature... (*MA*, 2: 176)

Mr Sterlin in the same novel has like ideas: 'he cherished the industrious Labourer, relieved the Wants of those whose Days of Work were at an end', and 'preserved the Superiority of his Birth and Fortune' whilst 'prevent[ing] all Law-suits amongst his Neighbours' (*MA*, 2: 190). In this, Sir William and Mr Sterlin, with their blameless histories and stern supervisory gazes, are rather *Grandisonian* than Fielding-esque, participating in the same 'community of appetite and feeling' as Richardson's hero.²⁸ These characters also recall Scott's Sir George Ellison, in her 1766 continuation of *Millenium Hall*, which is generally seen as a response to *Grandison* and in which the unswervingly virtuous hero knits together his community by supervising the industrious poor: he employs labourers for their own good, and adopts protégés from whom 'he required a letter every two months...continuing a dependance [*sic*] on him which could not fail proving of great service to them.'²⁹ The consequence for all, as for Sir Charles, is a magical prosperity: Sir Charles is initially concerned that his father's spendthrift ways have depleted his estate, but by the time of his marriage, these money-worries silently disappear to enable his charity. Similarly, Sir George Ellison accedes to wealth, and despite allowing all the local farmers free sport, Shebbeare's Mr Sterlin's

²⁷ [John Shebbeare], *The Marriage Act*, 2 vols (London, 1754), 2: 288. Hereafter cited in-text as '*MA*'.

²⁸ David Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in Early British America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997), xvi.

²⁹ [Sarah Scott], *The History of Sir George Ellison*, 2 vols (London, 1766), 1: 136-7, 2: 211.

‘Manors were filled with Game, whilst Gentlemen of more Rigour had scarce a Hare or a Partridge in theirs’ (*MA*, 2: 189-190). To read these figures as ‘Grandisonian’ is to identify their reproduction of features of the iconic virtue embodied in Sir Charles, to see them as ‘after-images’ of Richardson’s hero.

Sir Charles Grandison is exemplary not only locally, but to a wider imagined England.³⁰ Just as Sir Charles is a national pattern, Anna Meades’s *William Harrington*, which frames itself as having been edited by Richardson, concludes with its hero becoming part of a national network of revamped libertines, who disperse themselves throughout the country, each seeding his own virtuous community. In some ways, this speaks to a tradition of the rake reformed by wedlock, but it is significant that the closing marriages are compared to Sir Charles and Harriet’s (‘Here...is a noble parade for you! one almost as sumptuous as that on the wedding of *Sir Charles Grandison*’), with the new household at Harrington-Hall establishing a familiar rural utopia of grateful tenantry and gratified landlord: ‘what pleasure in life can exceed that of giving happiness to a set of honest creatures, made happy by your bounty?’³¹ Sir William Harrington’s associate Lord S., having been convinced by his friend’s example, determines to replicate this set-up at his Berkshire estate:

I intend to pay the people for my remissness in going thither, by following...the full example my brother has set us in this part of the world, endeavouring, in the same manner he has done, to win the affections of all the people under us. This...is a thing absolutely necessary to be done by all landlords, since they will ever be sure to find themselves better attended to through motives of love than those of fear... (*WH*, 2: 208-9)

The novel closes with nodes of Grandisonian virtue spread across several counties, with an obliged poor ‘attending to’ their exemplary gentry, both partners in a communally sustained moral order which forms a miniature ideal England.

Such tropes become current in the hackneyed novels which follow in *Grandison*’s wake. They are also important, however, for understanding the related strain of sentimental utopian writing by women, most obviously Sarah Scott and Mary Walker Hamilton, who imagine a perfect political order in the form of ‘female’ utopias, but who also, I suggest, share ideational structures with post-Richardsonian formula fiction. Their utopias are marked by the

³⁰ Many commentators have seen *Grandison*’s society as figuring Englishness: for example, Margaret Anne Doody, ‘Richardson’s Politics’, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 2 (1990), 113-26; Ewha Chung, *Samuel Richardson’s New Nation: Paragons of the Domestic Sphere and ‘Native’ Virtue* (New York, 1998); Teri Doerksen, ‘*Sir Charles Grandison*: The Anglican family and the admirable Roman Catholic’, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 15 (2003), 539-58.

³¹ [Anna Meades], *The History of Sir William Harrington*, 4 vols (London, 1771), 4: 202, 2: 207-8. Hereafter cited in-text as ‘WH’.

‘paternalism’ and ‘manipulation’ Gerard Barker finds in Sir Charles.³² The description of Millenium Hall mirrors the more obscure texts: as well as the managed ‘natural’ landscapes, the ladies live by the Grandisonian maxim that ‘the example of the great infects the whole community’, and their charity consists of directing its activities:

The ladies settle all these matters...and told us, that as they, to please God, assisted us, we must...serve others...[they] hire nurses for those who are very ill...[they] take every child after the fifth of every poor person, as soon as it can walk, till when they pay the mother for nursing it...There never passes a day that one or other of the ladies does not come and look all over our houses...it is all for our good (*MH*, 164, 66-7)³³

Managing the poor as a resource, they engineer mutually beneficial relationships between them—but, in familiar fashion, preserve the necessary hierarchy, such that the ladies remain at the centre of the community, ‘beholding numbers who derive every earthly good from your bounty’, just as Sir Charles is the focus of every reverential eye (*MH*, 120).

Like *Grandison*, *The Marriage Act*, and *Millenium Hall*, Mary Walker Hamilton’s *Munster Village* is a novel interested in social virtue and in an English national picture.³⁴ *Munster Village* can, like *Millenium Hall*, be read as having a Grandisonian tone, sharing with both a focus on the landed gentry and a subscription to a capitalist ethos. In a formulation which might act as epigraph to all of these texts, Hamilton’s Lady Frances defines virtue in latitudinarian terms as based in obliging others:

Virtue...is nothing else than that principle by which our actions are *intentionally directed*, to produce good, to the several objects of our free agency... what a superior joy have I not experienced...in exerting this disposition, in acts of beneficence!...It is true, the great works I have carried on... the manufactories I have introduced into this kingdom, &c. &c. have procured me the suffrage of the world, and may transmit my name down to posterity.³⁵

As for Sir Charles, virtue is construed as activity, benefiting others but reflecting on the donor, the exemplary community leader. Lady Frances models her own nature as a pattern, ‘constant in her attendance at church’ because ‘[p]ublic acknowledgements of the goodness of God...contribute to give a whole community suitable apprehensions of him: and these...it was equally her duty to propagate’ (*MV*, 1: 96). This utopia, like *Millenium Hall* and *Grandison-hall*, features a regulated peasantry; significantly, the estate is designed by

³² Barker, *Grandison’s Heirs*, 28.

³³ Compare Sir Charles: ‘People of fashion...should consider themselves as examples to the lower orders’ (*Gr.*, 7: 266).

³⁴ Eve Tavor Bannet compares them thus (‘The Bluestocking sisters: Women’s patronage, *Millenium Hall*, and “the Visible Providence of a Country,”’ *Eighteenth-Century Life* 30: 1 (2005), 25-55: 39).

³⁵ [Mary Walker Hamilton], *Munster Village, A Novel*, 2 vols (London, 1778), 1: 176-80. Hereafter cited in-text as ‘*MV*’.

Capability Brown, shorthand for a type of landscape marked by the sort of artful artlessness, the ‘subtle artifice’ embodied in Grandison-hall and its fictional descendants.³⁶ As Peter Denney notes, the Brownian landscape ‘resembles a set of spatial sumptuary laws’: the houses are built with gradations in their quality and situation, with the centre of the estate occupied by a panoptical ‘tribuna’.³⁷ It is here that Lady Frances’s statue is erected, stamping her priority onto the landscape (*MV*, 1: 64-7). Her estate is a functioning society, characterised, like Millenium Hall, by retreat, as Lady Frances pours her energy into ‘the care of her family, and...the improvement of [her] property’, eschewing ‘the world’ to create a ‘society...manifestly maintained by a circulation of kindness’ (*MV*, 1: 59-60). This society is not merely inward-looking, however, but represents an ideal Englishness. The narrator notes that Lady Frances’s library was ‘greatly wanted in this kingdom’, which ‘remains without any considerable public library’, discounting the Royal Society’s library and the British Museum as unfit for purpose (*MV*: 1: 68-9). If the Millenium Hall ladies offer an example which George Ellison reconstructs ‘on a smaller scale’, exporting their vision, Lady Frances aims for works of ‘national magnificence’, making explicit the ambition to refigure the nation that is visible in the other novels considered here (*MH*, 207; *MV*, 1: 91). Lady Frances’s organising energy and exemplary virtue, as well as her social position, allow her to construct a nation-estate markedly similar to Grandison-hall and to the ideal estates it foreshadows; in this way, the ideas sketched out in Richardson’s late fiction of a hierarchical community of the obliged poor and the adored gentry, self-contained and yet figuring the nation, are reproduced both in formula fiction and in proto-feminist utopian writing: all of these texts participate in a common ideology.

Shining lights and libertines: Contesting personal example

It would be misleading to suggest, however, that novelists following in Richardson’s footsteps subscribe uncritically to Grandisonian exemplarity. The personal magnanimity upon which the ideal community depends can also be construed as stifling, and as providing convenient advantages for the benevolent gentry. Texts such as *Millenium Hall* and *Munster Village* do not appear to register their protagonists’ dogmatic tendencies. An overbearing benevolence which accords glory to the genteel donor, is, however, a part of Richardson’s

³⁶ Tim Richardson, *The Arcadian Friends: Inventing the English Landscape Garden* (London, 2008), 468.

³⁷ Peter Denney, “‘Unpleasant, tho’ Arcadian Spots’: Plebeian poetry, polite culture, and the sentimental economy of the landscape park”, *Criticism* 47: 4 (2005), 493-515: 505.

legacy which his contemporaries single out. *Critical Remarks on Sir Charles Grandison* (1754), for instance, notes that Sir Charles's 'benevolence has something showy and ostentatious in it'.³⁸ Francis Plumer's *Candid Examination of...Grandison* (1755) charges that whilst Sir Charles is 'very active' in benevolence and 'superlatively good', he is also 'insufferably vain' and 'loves to hear himself talk'.³⁹ *Grandison* can be read not only as celebrating Sir Charles's brand of virtue, but also as exploring the 'cost of moral aspiration', or even as a form of 'totalitarian fiction', and this aspect of the novel figures in later writers' engagements with it.⁴⁰

John Kidgell's *The Card* (1755) concludes with such a critique. This novel explicitly rewrites aspect of *Grandison*'s plot, closing with the hero marrying an Italian bride. Kidgell also makes a cast of *dramatis personae* from other novels appear towards the end of his second volume. Kidgell playfully pairs unlikely characters at his hero's wedding ball, such as Roderick Random and 'Mrs Booby, late Miss Pamela Andrews', but saves his real satire for his own revived Sir Charles Grandison, who attempts to reprimand a reincarnated Tom Jones and is chastised in consequence, having 'the Misfortune to have his Ears boxed'.⁴¹ In a mocking trivialisation of Sir Charles's determination not to fight, his interference in other people's business is treated as a childish tendency requiring a nursery rebuke. Like Shebbeare, Kidgell positions his novel in the tradition of Fielding, eschewing Richardsonian exemplary virtue as rigid and stultifying—but, like Shebbeare, its very negotiation of such tropes can be seen as an interested *reproduction* of elements of *Grandison*. As David Brewer points out, 'there seems to have been something in Richardson's work which called out for engraftment, even if it did not guarantee adherence to Richardson's terms'.⁴²

Even novels as avowedly Richardsonian as Anna Meades's *William Harrington* can be read as part of a Grandisonian discourse which repeats without necessarily fully subscribing to the surveillance of the hero. Despite the novel's being written in homage to Richardson, its last epistolary word is given to a jaunty libertine rebuttal of Sir William's newfound rectitude, as Bob Loyd, Sir William's former companion, rejects Sir William's

³⁸ 'Lover of Virtue', *Critical Remarks*, 20.

³⁹ [Francis Plumer], *A Candid Examination of The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, 3rd ed. (London, 1755), 6, 19.

⁴⁰ Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist* (Ithaca, NY, 1973), 294; Rebecca Anne Barr, 'Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* and the symptoms of subjectivity', *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 51: 4 (2010), 391-408.

⁴¹ John Kidgell, *The Card*, 2 vols (London, 1754), 2: 294-6.

⁴² Brewer, *Afterlife of Character*, 129.

exhortations to conversion.⁴³ Loyd frames his erstwhile friend's Anglican virtue as pseudo-Methodist cant, mocking the reformed rakes' hortatory letters:

He may say—Oh, brethren! I have been wicked, very wicked, but I am enlightened by a new light...as a candle that hath been newly snuffed...so brethren, my sins have been cropt off; they no longer choak up my light...I am, I say, like a candle that hath been newly snuffed--&c. (WH, 4: 250)

This is an aspersion offensive both to Sir William, but also to Richardson's scepticism about 'enthusiasm'.⁴⁴ For all their cardboard predictability and derivation as pale imitations of Lovelace's crew, Meades's libertines can reply to the sermonising of the virtuous male characters, scorning them as 'new' and 'shining' lights, and asserting that they 'are not convinced of [Sir William's ideas] being better, or more conducive to *happiness* than our own'. They are given a successful ending, happily depriving the foolish Mrs Loyd of her fortune and absconding to the Carolinas with two girls they have 'ruined', before abandoning them for new adventures (WH, 4: 251-4). Just as *Grandison* ends with an invitation to imagine beyond the novel's end, so Meades allows the reader the pleasure of thumbing a figurative nose at the stuffiness of Sir William Harrington, as the libertines head off to the expansive horizons of the new world, suggestively excluded from the English rural utopias of Sir William and Lord S., but possibly enjoying rather a better time in the colonies. It is significant that as well as England, Meades's libertines eschew marriage, because it is this factor which, as well as taming Sir William and Lord S., stabilises the ideal communities they construct and constitutes the backbone of the novel's fantasy Englishness.

Wedlock and nunneries: The national significance of marriage

Marriage is a central concern of *Grandison*: Sir Charles is 'for having every-body marry'.⁴⁵ He promotes, mends, or supports the marriages of his sisters Charlotte and Caroline, the Beauchamps, Miss Mansfield, the O-Haras, the Danbys, his ward Emily, and even his former lover, Clementina. Adam and Eve's prelapsarian marriage is a recurrent trope of the novel, and marriage is the worst of punishments: when Sir Hargrave abducts Harriet, he threatens not to rape, but to *marry* her. I have argued elsewhere that Sir Charles's sponsoring of marriage ties generates a stable community, a microcosm of the nation in which couples are

⁴³ Meades makes comparisons between her characters and Richardson's (for example, WH, 1: 165, 248-9).

⁴⁴ For a discussion of Richardson's attitude to Methodism, see Misty G. Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Baltimore, 2012), 63-8.

⁴⁵ Richardson, *Grandison*, 2: 429.

fixed in respectable wedlock, ensuring their subordinating gratitude to him as the engineer of their bliss.⁴⁶ This is one way in which Sir Charles creates himself as leader within a society containing men older and of higher rank than he. This model of marriage also assumes a public interest in the formation of conjugal ties and in matrimonial conduct: Sir Charles is opposed to ‘private’ nuptials, and assumes a third-party monitory role in various marriages. Grandisonian marriage draws on a number of mid-century discourses, formulating a version of the institution which permits significant intervention and scrutiny by the benevolent hero, in the name of a greater good.⁴⁷ In this, *Grandison* does not simply reprise the standard eighteenth-century marriage ending; instead, it closely investigates how marriage stabilises a community, which is why, as John Allen Stevenson notes, the novel unusually does not end with a wedding but with married life.⁴⁸ I conclude by arguing that this vision of marriage as a matter of *public* interest, legislated for centrally, is reproduced in later fictions, and I focus on two perhaps unexpected candidates: Scott’s and Hamilton’s female utopias.

Sir Charles’s plan for a Protestant nunnery is a widely remarked feature of the novel, and represents in part a response to anxieties over single women of the propertied classes. Ruth Perry and Amy Froide both argue powerfully that such women in this period experienced a ‘great disinheritance’, marked by a proliferation of discourse around their place in society; Sir Charles’s nunnery allows these women a space outside of marriage in which they can be understood as productive rather than surplus.⁴⁹ Importantly, though, his plan does not come to fruition in *Grandison*, as Charlotte notes in frustration (*Gr.*, 4: 355). Instead, the hint is taken up outside the novel’s pages: Shebbeare fleshes out a copycat plan, but the most famous realisation is *Millenium Hall*, which provides, to re-invoke Kodat, a differently coloured ‘after-image’ of Sir Charles’s idea (*MA*, 2: 166-8). Scott elaborates the nunnery as a retreat for gentlewomen who dedicate themselves to self-improvement and charity—but it

⁴⁶ *Making Gender, Culture, and the Self in the Fiction of Samuel Richardson: The Novel Individual* (Burlington, VT, 2013), 167-181.

⁴⁷ Relevant here are the twin cultural imperatives of nuptial choice, but also the insistence on the importance of that choice, which meant that it could often be guided. See Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge, 2004), 286-7; Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 2007), 207, 242, 252. It is significant that *Grandison* was being finished and revised as the Hardwicke Marriage Act, which promoted ‘public’ marriage, was being passed (cf. David Macey, “‘Business for the Lovers of Business’: *Sir Charles Grandison*, Hardwicke’s Marriage Act, and the specter of bigamy,” *Philological Quarterly* 84: 3 (2005), 333-55).

⁴⁸ John Allen Stevenson, “‘A Geometry of his own’: Richardson and the marriage-ending,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 26:3 (1986), 469-83: 472.

⁴⁹ Perry, *Novel Relations*, especially 38-76; Amy Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005).

emerges that one of their primary purposes is the institutional promotion of marriage. In a manner akin to Sir Charles, the ladies of Millenium Hall develop a scheme to ensure the marriages of young women:

the ladies had...given fortunes...to about thirty young women, and...they had seldom celebrated fewer than two marriages in a year...Nor does their bounty cease on the wedding-day, for they are always ready to assist them...and watch with so careful an eye over the conduct of these young people, as proves of much greater service to them than the money they bestow... the young women bred up at the schools these ladies support, are so much esteemed for many miles round, that it is not uncommon for young farmers, who want sober good wives, to obtain them from there... (MH, 167-8)

The ladies thus systematise the nuptials of the lower orders, enabling suitable marriages through the formal gifting of money and advice. George Ellison's wife, appearing a few years later, will go one better than this, publicly signalling good wife material by pinning red ribbons onto the girls.⁵⁰ Here as elsewhere, the ladies' charity is a structural investment in the community: they promote not only agriculture, but human reproduction through state-sanctioned marriage, carefully managing the political economy of their hierarchized society.

Munster Village also features a 'nunnery' of sorts, an academy for young women 'who labour under any imperfection of body' so that 'by increasing their resources *within themselves*' they may 'compensate for their *outward defects*' (MV, 1: 77). Like the Millenium Hall ladies', however, this proto-feminist paradise is interested in marriage: the academy is in fact a school for wives, which 'runs counter to that of Madame de Maintenon...where the young women, who should have been instructed in...the duties of a family...were only fit to be addressed by men who were rich enough to require in a wife nothing *but virtue*'. In fact, as Lady Frances says, 'domestic society is founded on the union betwixt husband and wife' (MV, 1: 188, 1: 78-9, 1: 55). Part of her deliberate construction of 'society' is the formal sponsorship of new marriages.

The Millenium Hall ladies prescribe marriage not for themselves, of course, but for society at large. I read their institutional support for marriage as Grandisonian in that it reproduces an understanding of the virtuous protagonist not as merely generally sympathetic to marriage, but as the embodiment of a 'state' interest, acting 'on behalf of a larger social good'.⁵¹ In his novel, Sir Charles represents 'the public' and is '*intitled*' to intervene in and even to coerce marriages, acting as a marital broker and monitor well before he himself shows a serious inclination to wed (*Gr.*, 2: 307, 4: 315). Similarly, Mrs Maynard's explanation for the ladies' support for marriage is the Richardsonian sentiment that 'We consider matrimony

⁵⁰ [Scott], *George Ellison*, 2: 218.

⁵¹ Laura Hinton, 'The heroine's subjection: *Clarissa*, sadomasochism, and natural law', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32: 3 (1999), 293-308: 297.

as absolutely necessary to the good of society; it is a general duty' (*MH*, 163). There is a common ideological investment here. Just as *Grandison* hints at the possibility of a Protestant nunnery and includes the stories of 'old maids' such as Lady Gertrude, but then turns away from spinsterhood towards marriage as the most viable career for young women, so *Millenium Hall* actually locates normative female experience within state-run marriage, the individual's method of contributing to the communal good within the utopian estate society. This tendency, I suggest, is at least in part explicable as a reproduction of *Grandison*'s vision of virtue.

* * *

Looking back on the 1750s, Catherine Talbot remembered them fondly as 'those Giddy Years (those Harriet Byron Years)'.⁵² The legacy of *Clarissa* to the later novel is traceable in scores of heroines subject to parental tyranny and loathsome proposals.⁵³ *Grandison*'s impact, however, is less immediately visible: it is rather a legacy of ideas than characters. These ideas are manifest in multifarious ways, but by looking specifically at notions of community and marriage, we can see at least some of the ways in which the novel's powerfully appealing ideals of prosperity and stability set the tone for respondents of the 1750s and shortly thereafter, novelists who reshape the Richardsonian vision of the nation-estate perpetuated through virtuous marriage and genteel supervision for their own political ends.

⁵² Quoted in T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography* (Oxford, 1971), 360.

⁵³ Hinton, 'The heroine's subjection', 293-308.